

International workshop for the conservation of earth architecture and traditional constructive materials

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Since early eighties, Earth Architecture Seminars were organized by the National Institute of Anthropology and History, a federal governmental Mexican institution, to be developed every two or three years, mostly in the north of Mexico, due to the significant earth constructive tradition in this region of the country.

In these seminars, participants were mostly Mexican architects, restorers and archaeologist, of the National Institute of Anthropology and History, (INAH), from all over the country, and also architects from architecture colleges and universities.

Later the organizers of the seminar get in touch with architects and conservators working in different National Park Service offices in the United States, and also with architects working in civil associations, mostly from Cornerstones, a community partnership, who became in future seminars, co –organizers of the events, so the Seminar became an International event, (SICRAT: International Seminar for the conservation and restoration of earth architecture).

The first meeting, were only theoretical, where constructive technique knowledge and conservation experiences spread between the groups of participants.

But after some years, the team that organizes these seminars concludes that practical workshops were necessary to promote a more participative conservation experience. The organizers had the feeling that the seminar was not having a repercussion in preserving the vernacular architecture made with these materials.

That decision brought into a completely new program and the seminar not only changed its contents but also its name to International Workshop for the conservations of traditional earth architecture (TICRAT).

Since then, these workshops have been taken place not only in the north of México, like Chihuahua, Sonora, Zacatecas, Durango, but all over the country, like in Chiapas, in different cities of this state, and also in the south of United States, in diverse cities of New Mexico, Texas and Arizona.

The last ones had been sponsored by Mexican federal, municipal and local governmental agencies, by these agencies with the support of the National Park Service, and others with also the economic assistance of Cornerstones.

The workshop is structured in two branches: theoretical lessons in the morning and practical session in the afternoons during three days.

The group of professor is integrated by one or two architects with experience in earth architecture conservation, and also in earth architecture construction and structural problems, restorers with knowledge in the use of lime plasters, wood and earth constructive materials, and also in conservation theory, and a lawyer with knowledge in conservation legislation, accompanied by local masons, who are fundamental to help to transmit local constructive traditions.

Theoretical lessons are given in the morning, beginning with the legislations issues because most of the assistance to these workshops does not consider vernacular architecture as part of a national heritage to be preserved, so having this knowledge in the first session : that there are laws that protect it, is a remarkable aspect of the seminar.

The next theme is a general approach to the theory of architectural conservation and its application in the every day's people architecture.

Then we follow with traditional constructive materials and techniques lessons adapted to local constructive traditions, to conclude with an analysis of causes and effects of deterioration.

The workshop initiate with an analysis in field of the deterioration processes, hands on or practical experiences in making adobe pieces, earth renders, lime mortars, lime painting, and waterproofing with soap and alum, very simple but already forgotten practical knowledge mostly because they are being substitute by modern constructive techniques.

With this workshop the organizers intend to provide to not specialize in conservation architects, and to the owners or habitants of traditional houses, practical solutions to solve common deterioration processes in vernacular architecture, to give a practical respond to avoid the destruction of this important heritage.



Theoretical lesson in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, México.
Photo by Haydeé Orea Magaña



Practical workshop in the church of San Elizario, Texas, in the United States.
Photo by Pat Taylor.



Practical workshop in San Elizario, Texas, in the U.S. Rendering adobe walls with lime plasters.
Photo by Haydeé Orea.



Practical workshop in Chihuahua, México. Making adobes to repair an adobe wall.
Photo by Esther Enríquez.



Practical workshop in the Hacienda del Sombrerillo, Chihuahua, México. Applying earth and lime renders.
Photo by Antonio Guerrero